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ABSTRACT

The current tension in the writing of histories has been between the defense of "textbook" histories--i.e., the conventional approach which focuses on great events, great individuals, and great collectivities--and progressive--i.e., populist or alternative histories which focus on ordinary people. A new form has been engineered by television, which produces documentary-dramas and drama-documentaries by dramatizing histories and bringing them to life through individual accounts and experiences. These emergent forms have involved a shift in programming rationale to endorse long programs or mini-series; have taken on certain humanist and progressive critiques; and have adopted some dramatic and footage techniques that offer more daring accounts than earlier authoritative documentaries. Three documentaries illustrate different ways of writing about people and place as television: (1) "About Time," which spins a yarn about our notions of time and our relationships with time; (2) "The Country and the City," which presents the relationship between country and city as a central element in the development of capitalism; and (3) "The Dragon Has Two Tongues," which speaks of Welsh histories through two opposed historical viewpoints. These three examples have sought the essence of identity through mechanisms of time, and polarity, respectively, and each can be located within the transforming practice of writing and reading histories. However, constructed within the spectacle, and ordered by the present, they can at best make explicit those connections and acknowledge those restraints. (34 references) (CGD)

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CONSTRUCTING HISTORIES ON TELEVISION:

READING THE COUNTRY

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CONSTRUCTING HISTORIES ON TELEVISION

> I have the impression that many historians are perturbed by the treatment of historical subjects in ... films and TV ...
>
> What we are up against is the general assumption that anyone can be a historian or biographer ...
>
> If I am, in some limited sense, the custodian of national biography, how widely does my writ run? Historians in general need to be careful not to give any impression that there is any correct biographical or general historical interpretation which should be followed. But the case for condemning or trying to guard against stupid and shallow interpretations seems to me to be strong. (Serle, 1986)

This paper addresses some of the conflicts that surround representations of histories on television. The opening quotation is a familiar response by entrenched historians to such projects, a concern which emanates from a belief in a particular professional brief that prescribes certain ways of telling histories and of reading the past.

Yet the popularity of putting histories onto film (meaning film or video) suggests that a good deal more is at stake than simply the undermining of the custodial rights of one profession.

The institution of television has been especially decisive in the representation of history, indeed 'television history' has become a dominant motif of recent TV programming. Withstanding the declining popularity of the documentary and the interventions of 'progressive' TV histories, the institution of TV has engineered a whole new form of televising history in the form of the documentary-drama and drama-documentary, that is by dramatising histories, bringing them to life, through individual accounts and experiences. These emergent forms have entailed a shift in programming rationale to endorse long

programmes, or mini-series, i.e., a short run of 2-3 hour blocks, which interrupt previously sacrosanct weekly scheduling rituals. Documentary dramas also have taken on certain tenets of humanist and progressive critiques. As the Independent Film-makers' Association commented, the crossing of drama and documentary has:

> challenged documentary's claim to be concerned with facts because it has demonstrated it as a particular set of conventions of programme construction. The generic mixing of documentary and drama has shown that the 'factness' of facts is a product of the programme format: anything stated in a documentary form, supported by contextualising material, becomes a fact. (The Independent Film-makers' Association, 1980/81:63)

In turn, those documentaries that have persisted have adopted some of the dramatic and action footage techniques of their usurpers and thereby have offered more daring accounts than the earlier authoritative voice of the golden age documentaries (cf. as argued in the Granada Television series' programme on The Rise and Fall of the Documentary; also see Caughie, 1981).

As a result, 'history' has changed: as a practice, it has been interrogated on many levels by many people; as a circulating commodity, it has become, in its own terms, available to all. Of all the changes to 'history', perhaps the one of greatest importance has been the gradual but now widely accepted view that there is never the history, the definitive account, the true story: there are shifting historical practices of writing and reading, and many points of view, moreover:

> the crucial evaluative function is the judgment of conventions themselves, from a deliberate and declared position of interest. (Williams, 1979:306)

There can be no complete or single story; as one anthropologist noted:

> It's just a spectacle for that little moment, there is no insight into ... (a) culture as a whole way of life. (Yu in Benterrak et al., 1984:212)

As a result of the widespread production of histories, attention has turned to the insertion of histories into cultural contexts:

> The misfortune of history is the responsibility it is forced to bear, the responsibility of telling us what happened in the past so that our present and future actions will be guided with this knowledge. And it has been the Left which has asked so much of history, insisting that it go beyond the orthodox demand for a history which maintains a continuity with the values of the present, a history which would never contradict current conceptions of 'common-sense'. (Ibid.:125)

They go on to argue that history writing involves producing many different stories about different groups from specific points of view:

> Successive rewritings of history would then become a task of producing different sets of stories ... not in the name of the 'truth' ... but with the idea of seeing history as always being written within political formations. (Ibid.:126)

The current tension in the writing of histories has been between the defence of 'textbook' histories, that is, of the common accounts that circulate across various institutional sites, on the one hand, and progressive, that is populist or alternative histories, on the other. Textbook histories have been characterised as concerning great events, great individuals, and great collectivities (cf. Bennett et al., 1981:286). The Left has described them as histories of ruling groups, of the powerful and of power. The response has been to produce 'alternative' histories of the non-powerful, of the ruled, of 'ordinary people': histories of little people, populist histories:

of those who have been 'hidden from history' (cf. Tribe, 1981:319-321).

Yet what is the outcome of these histories? Are they in fact being accorded a greater status of 'truth' than conventional histories? If mobilised as a political strategy, then such histories can no longer be read as just another story. What is the relation between the different groups of people addressed in alternative histories and addressed by television histories?

These conflations have been especially highlighted in the projects of television histories. Conventional historiography fed into the conventions and techniques of early documentary production thus constructing teleological views of history in which the viewer is locked into a dominant point of view constructed through the figure of narration and the truth of images. Progressive TV histories, by contrast, have sought to escape this teleology through multiple voices organised to undercut those textbook histories. The progressive, however, merely functions as the opposition, as the other side of a binary conception of philosophy and knowledge, where an implicit reading position is necessarily inscribed as somewhere in between. As MacCabe says of Days of Hope, it must be read as located in a particular historical conceptual framework, namely of the actual failure of the General Strike, that 'the only knowledge that the text can produce (which will have the necessary finality and leave history as it is) is that of betrayal. Given that we can see that the workingclass were honest, straightforward and committed to socialism, their defeat must be the work of the leaders who betray them' (MacCabe, 1981:312).

The progressive, then, has entailed the excavation of 'peoples', of groups long buried under the priorities of historical accounts: the main peoples who have been dug up and recuperated have been working-class(es), women, ethnic groups, and children. And yet the tendency has been to merely parade these archaeological treasures as the underside of histories, as the alternative precisely. The teleological mechanism may have shifted from the figure of 'progress' to the figure of 'oppressors (under capitalism)' but the historical framework and reading/viewing point of view remains bi-polar, in which commonsense falls about midway: despots, naive commoners, fanatical women, and popular leaders each lose their extremism in the available readings. Under this regime, the progressive remains on the margins - revealing the hidden, 'displacing political question onto the terrain of the person' (McArthur, 1978:55), setting diverse accounts side-by-side, and transgressing aesthetic conventions. McArthur notes how The Cheviot, The Stag, and the Black, Black Oil replaced character actors with 'the demotic forms of circus and music hall' (Ibid.:52), a move which explicitly counterposes the fixity of historical forces (whether represented as characters or institutions) with the carnivalesque of the everyday, that is, with life as fantasy.

More commonly, the progressive has entailed an excursion into oral histories - of individuals and collectivities - which work to reveal actual biographies, actual conditions and actual effects. They emphasise the recovery of the past, the affirmation of identity and survival, the centrality of personal experience, family life and community (cf. Ryan, 1986). Such features recur among dispossessed groups, yet such accounts seem to merely be placed alongside

conventional accounts where the personal and retrieved voices work to undermine and revise the accepted history. This has two problems:

1. It does not in fact intervene in the historical conception in which this process takes place; individual accounts still take pride of place.

2. It assumes (and frequently does not argue for) the greater truth of the alternative account, frequently on moral or humanist grounds.

Political sympathies are taken for granted in the process of submitting the alternative and progressive account but neither the basis of the political or historical terrains is squarely placed on the agenda. The result is that revisionist histories both in written and filmic texts are becoming the order of the day, in which the excavated make cameo appearances or become the object of political strategies under slogans such as positive discrimination, multi-culturalism, the personal is political, self-determination, etc. In such cases, the essential epistemology remains intact.

One unusual and ambitious project that attempted to displace the conventional-progressive couplet has become a book entitled Reading the Country which involved the recording of a journey through the Roebuck Plains of Western Australia. The book attempts to constitute 'a politics of place', a set of quite different records 'of fragmentation, contradiction, unanswered questions, specificity, fluidity and change':

> to construct a theory of place, to find a method of charting the meanings of those specific places in which people must find a way to live in one manner or another. (Benterrak:12)

Now pockmarked by stations (farms), mines and towns, the plains also have another set of mappings by their traditional owners, local Aboriginal groups. The journey involved an Aboriginal guide, Paddy Roe, taking a white Australian linguist and a Moroccan artist through the Aboriginal map, literally cutting across boundary fences and locked gates, through which permission to pass had to be sought:

> We did this on several occasions, Paddy Roe bringing a diplomatic boomerang: a metaphorical key perhaps, one that would 'unlock' any opposition from the station people. (Ibid.:66)

As Roe explained his appropriation of the country, through anecdotes and tales, the artist painted his readings of the landscape:

> Painting a landscape is not 'to pin down its essence, to make it still, but to trace a path which the eye can follow into the space which is tomorrow's painting. (Ibid.:192)

The text of the book, recordings of stories, photography and organisation was largely the work of the linguist. As such, the book appears as a heterogeneous set of texts though a set ostensibly organised around Aboriginal readings of the country. It is an intriguing collection of distinct and competing traces of the category of 'place' and the couplet owner/visitor, an approach which revises the conventional tenets of ethnographic (historical/anthropological) reportage. Rather than organising its reading around institutional and disciplinary accounts, the book attempts to actualise Althusser's claim that there is a 'peculiar time and history' for each mode of production, for each philosophy, for each form of aesthetic production, and so on. It seeks thereby 'to construct <u>knowledge</u> (of the past but <u>for</u> the present) on the basis of what the past said about itself in its forms of signification' (McArthur:55).

Ultimately, however, the linguistic voice comes to order the other voices, 'reading' the Aboriginal voice by providing a point of view, as in the following example:

> One way to read Paddy Roe's story about the oil companies is in terms of stark moral dualism: one company is nomadic - it stops and starts and accepts the custodianship of the two young Aboriginal men who change over for each stretch of country; the other is antinomadic - it just barges through. Representing searchers for oil in the Kimberleys according to this kind of structure in no way contests their presence as capitalist enterprises. Paddy Roe's narratives are not contestatory. (Benterrak:204)

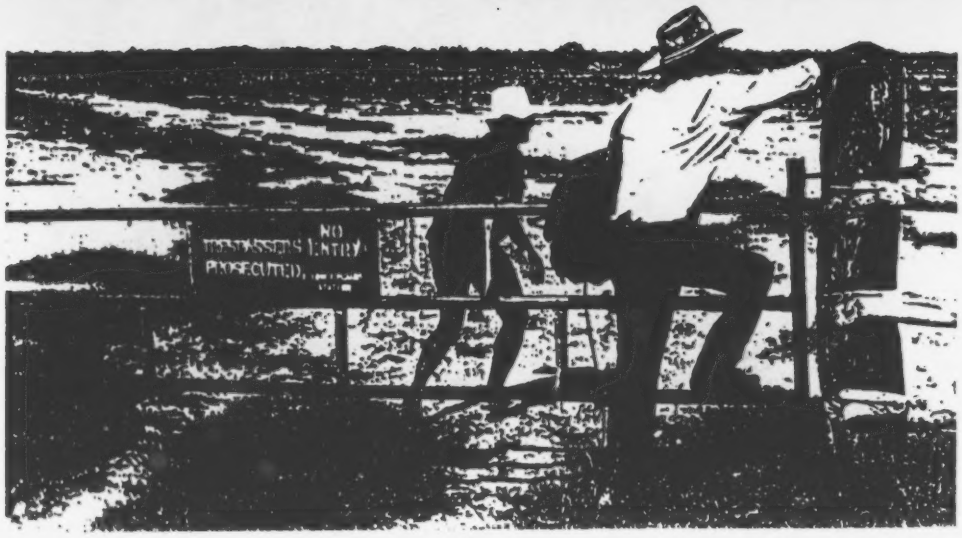
The recording and interpreting of Roe's stories is not altogether satisfactory; one reviewer commented that:

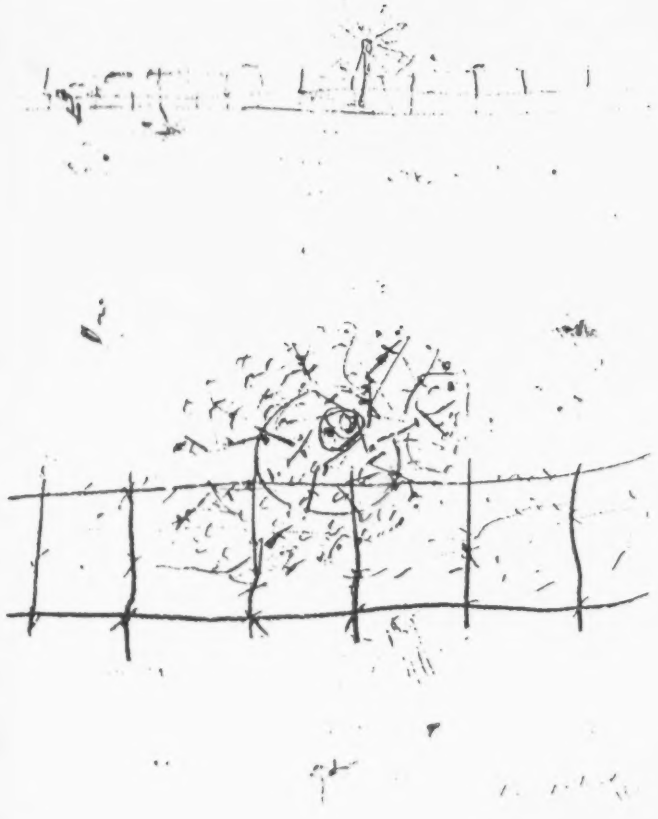
> the rigorous transcription of oral language into black squiggles (without the additional advantages of gesture, facial expression and physical context) makes the book read like a kind of latter-day Uncle Remus chronicle. (Marshall-Stoneking, 1985:16)

Moreover, there is a sense in which Roe himself constantly resists being transcribed, as in refusing to elaborate on how to make rain:

> 'That's why we can't teach young people this time - we put lotta things away from these fellas ...'. Paddy goes on to censure the misuse of sacred and tribal knowledge; the young, he says, just want him to make the country 'move'. 'See today everybody all want to know.' This story surely also falls back on Roe's interlocutors, Muecke and Benterrak, and on us. The resonance of the irony continues past the end of the story. Because we want to know too. (Mead, 1985:16)

But the most interesting problem of the book, particularly in the light of the construction of television histories, is the difficulty that the book has in dealing with the accompanying paintings. Although present, they are scarcely addressed and therefore resist being read in this collection of readings. Ironically, the paintings





"READING THE COUNTRY" : above : Crossing boundaries
below : Recording the country

would fare better in a book of their own, a book without text or readings. For surrounded by a politics of readings that eschew conventional aesthetic discourses, the paintings are submerged and uninterrogated.

Though resorting to addressing the eye, the organ of seeing, of that which can 'read' paintings, little can be said in this particular configuration of competing voices, about that which seeks to escape the tyranny of the word, of being pinned down by the alphabetic regime of writing and reading.

The production of 'alternative' or competing filmic accounts encounters a related set of paradoxes, some of which have been discussed by Eaton, in relation to the film Two Laws, in which the Boorooloola Aboriginal community determined how the film should be filmed:

> But, interestingly enough, although the film's aesthetic strategies are contingent on priorities of Aboriginal custom and social relationships, these strategies also happen to accord with those of realist cinema. (Eaton, 1983:56)

This was particularly the case in the use of a wide-angle lens throughout the film, a decision determined by Aboriginal opposition to close-ups which, they believe 'dissect' the body:

> When looking at other films of Aboriginal places the people always discussed the land, the mountains and the rivers, whether it was good country for hunting. The wide-angle lens allows people to be placed in the country. (Kaufman in Ibid.:56-67)

This filmic strategy, then, is explicitly concerned with filmic subjects in their context, a strategy which undermines the reliance on

individual experiences and points of view as truth; rather, 'with the use of the wide-angle in group discussions, contradictions are revealed within the frame' (Ibid.:57). Two points are relevant to the discussion here: firstly, the limits to alternative documentary making, or rather, to the notion that conventions can be discarded rather than displaced or re-mapped; and secondly, that a key movement within progressive film-making has been away from the preoccupation with the individual towards the celebration of context (with peoples and places). The question is whether this movement reveals a more true 'truth' or merely a complementary 'truth'.

Just as the written text has a particular and circumscribed relation to the image, so the regime of the image (via film and TV) has a particular relation to the written. It is this relation with which the opening quotation is concerned. The construction of television histories involves reconciling the respective time and history of philosophy, of the discipline of writing history, and of the regimes of televisuality.

> It is the institution television which is of primary ideological significance rather than the points of view of particular broadcasters (or the) historiography in what actually happens in the screen. (McArthur:15)

In the concern with the possibilities for constructing television histories and with the constraints on that process, in what ways can one move beyond the conventional-progressive couplet? McArthur's Television and History and the McCabe/McArthur/Tribe/Caughie exchanges (reprinted in Bennett et al.) suggest that the development of televisual forms and techniques which have fused drama and

documentary have occurred in the context of a decisive contestation of conventional historiography by progressive and populist readings. Together these have significantly shifted the terms of writing and reading histories, an example of which is evinced by tendencies in more recent television histories. Here it is argued that the progressive tendency cannot be read just an epistemological intervention, but as the political project of populism, as a specific historical movement. Its effects however have been both political and institutional, shifting the terms of academic and popular debates, and transforming diverse regimes of 'reading' and 'writing'.

Undoubtedly, documentaries have transformed some of those conventions - undercutting techniques of 'realism', introducing techniques of 'the real', making explicit political interventions, counterposing the intellectual and the popular - thereby, undermining conventions which:

> have worked to equate the camera eye with that of the spectator and to privilege the visual as opposed to the audible to achieve the effect of a 'realism'. (Johnston, 1982:12)

Instead, progressive documentaries privilege modes of indirect address to de-stabilise the sound/image elision by:

> combin(ing) two modalities of indirect address in relation to the spectator: a neutral, observational use of the eye together with a participatory camera eye in which the group foregrounds its presence in the first person in discussion with the subjects of their films. (Ibid.:12)

In addition, the combination of non-fictional and fictional material addresses multiple histories - oral histories, community histories, popular memory, and political histories. Yet there may be a limit to

how much progressive documentaries can in fact constitute progressive cultural forms, constraints determined by the institutions of television and film. As Williams has commented:

> I don't think even within the most extended version of documentary, it could. I think by its nature it is tied to named people and places. (Aspinall & Williams, 1982:147-8)

Even when people tell their own story/ies, spectators are still positioned in particular ways in relation to those tales, just as the teller is placed in relation to the text, being 'pulled inside' and becoming 'a part of it'. As Portelli notes:

> Oral history is not the point where the working class speaks for itself. (Portelli, 1981:104)

Rather, the teller is just another type of document for the historian/film maker:

> Even accepting that the working class speaks through oral history, it is clear that the class does not speak in the abstract, but speaks to the historian, and with the historian, ... (and) through the historian. (Ibid.:105)

The spoken testimony cannot remain unattached as unique traces but is necessarily constructed as narrative points of view within the text:

> Oral history is told from a multitude of 'circumscribed points of view': the narrator (where partiality stands both for taking sides and for unfinishedness). The partiality of oral history is both political and narrative: it can never be told without taking sides, since the 'sides' exist inside the account. (Ibid.:106)

Nonetheless, a good deal of popular television has come to turn on locating people and popular voices (e.g. through techniques like vox pop, talking heads, studio audiences, game show contestants, consumer redress programmes), yet the quarry is often elusive:

> It seems that the working class has a trick of invisibility and sometimes vanishes altogether. (Price, 1982:15)

This paper however wishes to move beyond simply celebrating the excavation of various peoples and endorsing the project of populism in order to suggest how this project can be located as a practice of accounting. It suggests that the shift from an emphasis on relations of power to relations of existence and resistance has entailed two key moments, namely the examination of the establishment of conventions (how the 'commonsense' is constructed and put into play) and the reconstitution of the relationship between people and place (how the dualism individual: society has become people: place). These processes, might be termed the practices of 'reading the country', borrowing from the title of the already-cited book, that is, of constructing a new grid of identity and identification.

It is to this end that the documentaries, The Country and The City, About Time and The Dragon Has Two Tongues might be read. It is not my intention to align them as some unified trinity, but merely to examine how each constructs a people : place grid, that is to say, how each reads the country in relation to one particular metaphor concerning tourism. Tourism has become a dominant theme of a number of current rhetorics since it effortlessly transcends time, space, social statuses and cultural differences; moreover, it is employed as a metaphor for capitalist development:

> the diversities and discontinuities of ... (a) culture and reproduced in the tourist shops where large revolving stands of post cards juxtapose images which create ... a specific locality at the same time as reactivating the tourist as subject, a subject which is supposed to slot into this environment in a particularly important way: tourism is ... (a) major industry. This is perhaps the reason for the peculiar intensity with which tourists 'read' the images on these post-card stands. (Benterrak:203)

Tourism, then, is about indulging in fantasy about one's imaginary relation to a site as transient and illusory, yet it depends on the availability of 'real' sites, the discovery of 'real' places and the experiencing of 'real cultures':

> 'Seaside holiday' is represented by the British dirty-joke cartoon cards and by 'Surfers' bikini ones. The Aboriginal culture is coded exclusively in terms of a traditional and unified culture; the Aborigines shown might come from Central Australia or the Northern Territory, now both great centres for the reproduction of Aboriginal culture as a commodity. Romantic and Anthropological discourses on Aborigines also aid this distancing and reconstruction of Aboriginal culture as past and thereby fixed. Cultural 'safety regulations' for postcard production make it impossible to produce postcards of, say, an Aborigine with Kellogs for breakfast. The next card on the stand might be one of a Broome industry, the meatworks, pearling, or an off-shore oil rig. All these industries are normalized for cultural consumption at the popular cultural level of the postcard. They all become equally part of the tourist-subject's world. Just as one accepts notions of Aboriginality as 'traditional', so too the appearance of American companies drilling for oil or gas on the North-West shelf passes under the sign of 'the normal', the unquestionable. (Ibid.:204)

As an industry, tourism has acquired the star of economic salvation and has been sanctioned by a rhetoric of cultural pluralism, in which forms of leisure take precedence over forms of production. Raymond Williams has commented that:

> Even a Keynesian economist could tell me - ironically in a country pub, since it is part of the ideology that the country is where you go on Sunday - that 'the sheep is an uneconomical animal' and that the sooner the sheep farmers of Wales give up or get engrossed the better; leaving those hills, presumably as an empty recreation area, for the discovery of nature. (Williams, 1979:314)

Yet for Williams, the trend that turns farms into fields for the gaze of tourists (sightsee-ers precisely) is a change justified not by economic arguments but by the rhetorics of urbanism and industrialism

under which 'rural values belong to the past', 'food production had been displaced' yet in a situation where there 'was still a crisis of land and labour' (Ibid.:315). Paradoxically, the transformation of the text The Country and The City into a television film depended on finding a tourist site that could literally display an economic history:

> I didn't see how it could be filmed. I think the key is that we found Tatton Park, which is the perfect example of the changes which happen to a village. What I did in the book was to generalise: but here we had something on the ground. (North, 1979:27)

The documentaries have been chosen as three rather different ways of writing about people and place as television. About Time uses chronology as the key to people : place; The Country and The City uses spatial economics as its key; and The Dragon uses counterposed histories as its key. Of the three, About Time, is the most conventional, attempting as it does to spin a yarn about our notions of time and our relationships with time through a succession of images which illustrate an authoritative narration. This paper looks at an excerpt about tourism and holidays from the episode entitled Holy Days. It is suggested that this programme offers the metaphor of time as the key to the people : place puzzle, yet in two ways: either the past works to directly explain the present or the present is cast as timeless, transcending explanation. Under this construct, people are simultaneously the product of past forces beyond their control yet they are also individual subjects, marked by free-will and the phenomenological. These unlikely bedfellows function as posing escape from the tyranny of the past, allowing the confirmation of the concept of unique individual destiny.

The Country and The City, by contrast, explicitly seeks to displace conventional accounts of industrialisation and progress and an inevitable unfolding of forces dependent on the periodic intervention of key individuals with vision. The film is 'an account of the way people have been seeing and writing about the relationship between town and country for centuries' (North:27). For this account, the relationship between country and city has been a central element in the development of a capitalist economic formation, although the nature of the relationship has shifted at various points. Although the programme adopts an authorial narration, the organisation of point of view is unfamiliar as television resisting 'chronological monism', great historical characters and a 'consistent' history.

The Dragon is perhaps the most unusual of the three, attempting to speak of Welsh histories through two opposed historical viewpoints actualised through two actual historians 'dressed' for the part. While counterposing two accounts (readings) of those histories, the series resists overlaying an interpretative point of view (through a neutral narrator) but leaves the work of reconciling the history of the textbook and the history of the people to the viewer: 'The final judgement is left to the viewer ... to take an informed critical position which may be distinct from that of the presenters' (HTV and Channel 4 study pack to The Dragon Has Two Tongues). While viewers are now familiar with official versus popular accounts through the proliferation of television histories, the series does pose problems as a text in its refusal to supply a reading grid, a coherent point of view for the spectator. It will be argued that this strategy produces a chaos of possible reading positions that undermine rather than enhance the work of the programme.

About Time is centrally concerned with invisibility - with the loss of natural markers of social life - of seasons, rites of passage and festivals. Berger's series adopts an evolutionary argument about unfolding civilisation although this is seen to have been at the cost of knowing 'our place'.

> Our calendar was once packed with local rites of passage that marked the key stages of the year ... (Festivals articulated) the round of seasonal activities on the land ...
>
> One of the effects of the Industrial Revolution has been a drastic thinning out of these festival rites of passage. City life has desensitised us to how intimately we are defined by the rhythms of the shifting seasons ... Summer represents the holiday we hope we can afford. (Rawlence, 1985:61)

The argument of the text is an extreme form of chronological monism, namely of biological determinism:

> the controversial inference that human beings have evolved a psychic need for seasonal rites of passage which modern industrial life largely denies them. (Ibid.:62)

While festivals that have persisted (e.g. May Day, effigy burning, Christmas) are dealt with as vestigial remains of earlier 'more meaningful' times, holidays are privileged as the new form of festival. Holidays are cast as an activity that is an outcome of industrialisation as the commodity form of the festival, though not bound to particular times of the year. The character of holidays is demarcated in relation to the workplace (paid holidays and as an anti-dote to 'work time') 'when the ravages of work are healed and recoveries are made' (Ibid.:74).

The story of holidays is told through images and documents, and through two authors (Bob Bushaway and Edmund Swinglehurst) and a

21 "ABOUT TIME" : The traditional English holiday

22
"ABOUT TIME" : tourist pleasure ?

'great individual' (Thomas Cook). Yet the story is cast as a popular tale, of the winning of the right to holidays by the people (incidentally attributed to the activities of Thomas Cook although in fact occurring a century later). Class, morality, education and enlightenment feature in this account organised by an evolutionary view of the crysallis-like working population, reflected in this question posed in the programme:

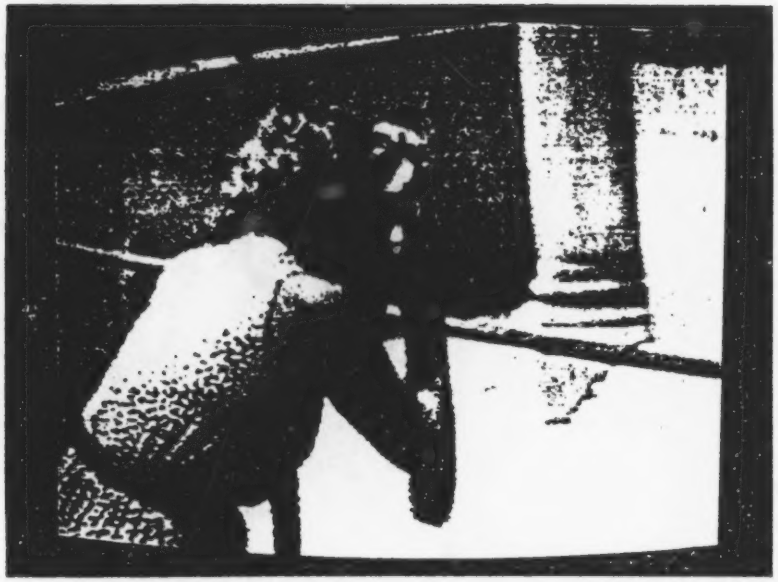
> Did the middle-class people who took these holidays abroad experience the same release from everyday morality and convention that the working class experienced at the seaside? (Ibid.:77)

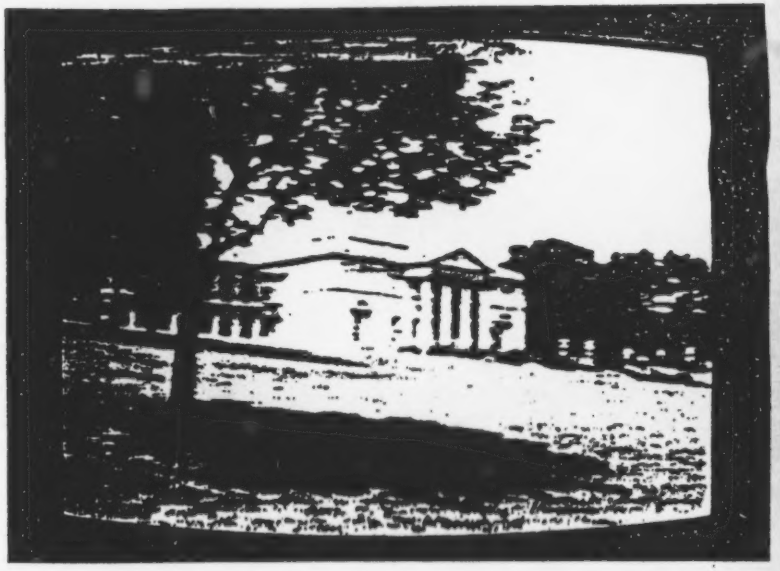
The meaning of holiday is constructed as an escape from time, yet through souvenirs, as the taking away and capturing of time:

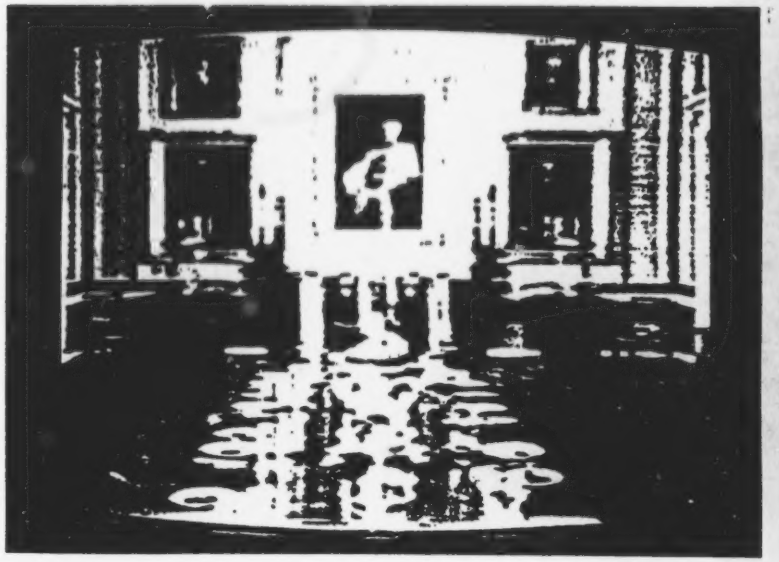
> The essence of a holiday is not learning about cultures ... It's to break free from the rhythms of work time and the constraints of everyday space ... The modern holiday is a time out of time. (Ibid.:78)

Or, as an unidentified voice says, 'You can do most whatever you want'. Overall, this segment works to resist an explanation of tourism other than as an inevitable unfolding of historical forces which have vestigial links with origins but 'really' constitute a celebration of the individual, as the consumer of pleasure and locus of desire.

About Time's discussion of tourism is familiar and its techniques of telling are conventional, yet as a text it tells us little about tourism in favour of an indulgence in narcissism. In contrast The Country and The City was concerned with displacing such familiar accounts; as Williams has noted:







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'About Time'
'The Country and The City'

above : sightseeing
below : siteseeing

'THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY'

above : Tatton Park
below : Visible consumption

25

> The cathedrals are not just monuments to faith, the country houses are not just buildings of elegance. They are constantly presented to us as 'our heritage', inducing a particular way of seeing and relating to the world, which must be critically registered along with our acknowledgement of their value. (Williams, 1979:309)

This project of examining how key sites are constructed and appropriated as embodiments of 'our past' and 'our history' makes quite explicit how those connections are defined and how those sites can then function, thereby questioning the kinds of assumptions that underlie the illustration of arguments through obvious images (history = country houses, etc.). Thus, the kinds of associations which are offered in Holy Days are the material for interrogation in The Country and The City:

> My project ... was to try to show simultaneously the literary conventions and the historical relations to which they were a response - to see together the means of production and the conditions of the means of production ...
>
> My intention was to dramatise the tension between the houses and the poems, to pose the contrast between the two ... as representations of history - including ... misrepresentations. (Ibid.:304)

The problem for this project was to find and juxtapose images which could work 'as document' yet still pose questions about tensions and contradictions:

> It (The Country and The City) takes a theme and finds a practical, visual embodiment of it. It provides a very direct comparison between the type of documentary which says here is an intellectual argument, how can we film it - which in that particular case meant saying instead of the whole argument about the country house, let us find a country house, look at its history and half the film was built round that - but there's no continuity of people in it (in contrast to So That You Can Live). (Aspinall & Williams:150)

For this argument, the country house symbolised the emergent relations in industrial development, namely:

1. the transformation of land use from production to consumption (of the pleasures of the squatocracy to the long history of visitors/ tourists to the great estates);

2. skimming off profits made in the city from industrial production for re-investment in the country in forms of consumption (illustrated graphically in landscape gardening - the creation of 'pleasing prospects' and 'framed views which have been ordered and paid for');

3. the shift from a relation of paternalistic domination by lords over vassals to wage labour exploitation with minimal contact between landowners/industrialists and labourers;

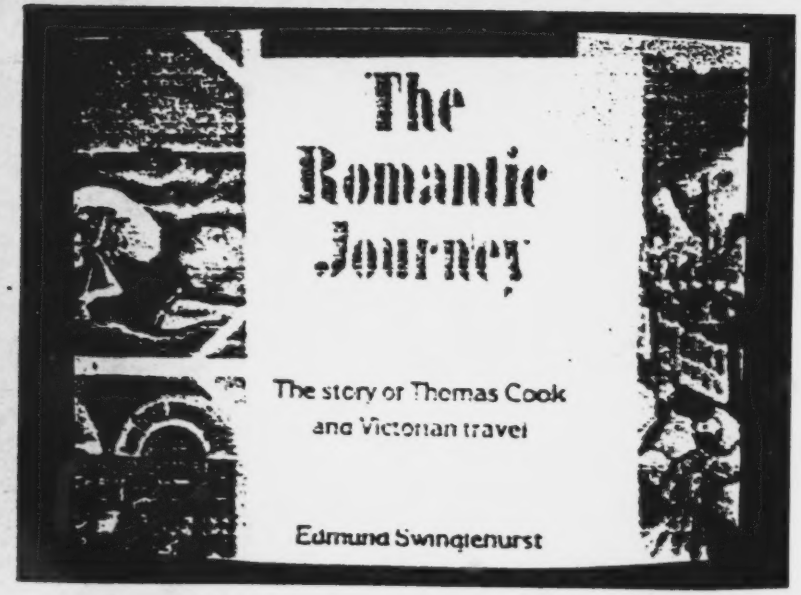
4. that the provision of a lavish rural lifestyle was only possible through the unacknowledged experience of generations of workers.

5. since consumption only works in its visibility, a regime of spectatorship and vicarious consumption has been established through the classification of country houses as national heritage and as tourist sites: the pleasurable face of capitalism.

Tatton Park offered itself as a site and as a set of images which could 'actualise' the elements of the argument:

> Tatton Park is a stately house not far south of Manchester, and its history from the seventh century demonstrates the harsher facts behind the rural fantasy in which urbanites now like to indulge. Peasant farmers had become the labourers of tenant farmers by the 17th century. Within a few hundred years they would be dispossessed altogether to make way for a picturesque park. Only successive injections of finance from the nearby city kept the Big House going. (North:27)

As the material for television, Tatton Park could function as a specific case study, in which individual exploiters could be named and



28 "ABOUT TIME" above : the romance of old travel
below : the technology of new travel

"THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY" above : Landscaped gardens
below : Recreations of old pasts

portrayed precisely through a succession of portraits which depict rich, well-fed figureheads. Their history of exploitation through making huge profits which were channelled from city to country could be illustrated through documents, and paintings concerning enclosure and arranged marriages. The thread through this history is the concept of production as activity and of consumption as passivity, in which class is constructed through the figure of class subjects.

Although the images of tourism that we see - individuals wandering around, commenting on 'how interesting' it is, how nice it is to see 'history', how a nice cottage would be as good as the big house to live in, etc. - the camera and the narration continually re-position those tourists as part of the underside of class history. We are reminded that country houses are 'overwhelming', 'out of scale', that national heritage means in fact 'generations of unacknowledged labour'. For although places like Tatton are pleasant, they should 'not be enjoyed nostalgically' since they were 'built as exclusive places for us only to visit'. Williams has written of heritage sites:

> I always see them as profoundly ambivalent. But, of course, if we did not acknowledge their contribution, we would be regressing to an identification with the simple cultivator before the advent of any civilisation at all, which would be absurd. (Williams, 1979:309)

Overall, The Country and The City constructs a sustained critique of 'a ruling-class agrarian order of the past' while advocating 'the continuity and relevance of real values of rural life and labour' (Ibid.:313), particularly of combatting 'an urban idiocy: the idea that food grows in shops' (Ibid.:322). To this end, Williams calls for 'the restoration of harmony' between the country and the city in

order to achieve a balance between past and present, and between production and consumption. The restoration of balance will, it is argued, foster the development of a political awareness that could potentially intervene in international economic interests. While a widely accepted view from the Left, this position runs this risk of resorting to a concept of the rural idyll, despite earlier moves to displace that idealism. With the reliance on familiar images of rural life within the regime of television, the tendency to idealise and romanticise that historical space seems especially tempting:

> Thus while The Country and The City illustrates some of the capacities of popular television to construct alternative positions, ultimately it may merely map out the limits to political television. (Craik, 1984:19)

Since The Country and The City was made (with an unexpected absence of debate), the possibilities for television to tell stories and to make political interventions have altered considerably. This was especially illustrated by the discussion that surrounded the production of So That You Can Live, a film about the political economy of South Wales, through the eyes of the members of one family. Its success in terms of techniques of alternative (progressive) film-making has been widely canvassed, yet I am more interested in its politics and how they might be read in relation to the later production, The Dragon. For So That needed to come to terms with the shifting political grid of a place that had come to be neatly pigeonholed as a history of sixty years of economic decline and periodic crises; as 'a region marked by economic depression and consistently high unemployment even during the years of British "prosperity"' (Price:14). Since the 1930s 'the people of South Wales

"THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY": Making national heritage available to all

"THE COUNTRY AND THE CITY" above: Tatton Park gardens
below: framed views

have been the subjects of innumerable documentary films, novels, photographs and magazine articles' (Ibid.:15), in forms which:

> had already been organised around the notion of 'problem areas' in which people were investigated as subjects and constructed as 'the poor', the 'unemployed' and so on. (Ibid.:15-16)

Yet the actual 'political economy' of South Wales has not been a homogeneous social fabric; Gwyn Williams pointed to the rise in Toryism and the decline of Labourism corresponding to 'the deproletarianisation of Wales, or anything to do with Welsh nationalism' (Aspinall & Williams:151). Rather, accounts of Wales must question the assumption:

> that Wales is this solid Labour country with a great proletarian tradition and can never be anything else. It is observably becoming something else, it is in a state of great confusion. (Ibid.:151)

Even if Wales can be represented in terms of a homogeneous past (an assumption which may also be questionable - see Williams, 1982: 189-201), Wales is now 'much less distinctive and much less proletarian' (Ibid.:159). However the new Welsh fabric does not hold the same magnetic draw for the camera as that of a people's past:

> It (So That) largely avoids the culture which has replaced older Welsh traditions founded on literacy: the losses and gains of television, compulsory education and (beyond a brief bingo sequence) the commercialisation of leisure. (Aspinall & Merck, 1982:158-9)

The Dragon also avoids confronting the less romantic images of the present, but in contrast to the participant-documentary of a 'typical' family, it attempts to put the past through two contemporary

historical mills, one which sieves for the rulers and one which sieves for the ruled. Their oppositional points of view are characterised in the following comments of Gwyn Williams about his co-presenter Wynford Vaughan Thomas:

> Every historian is a magpie including yourself, and the facts you choose invariably seem to me to turn Welsh history into something cosy, smug, and invariably support whatever status quo exists .... (marxist history is rooted) in whole peoples, not in tiny elites. (HTV and Channel 4 study guide to The Dragon Has Two Tongues)

This strategy might be read as the historians' response both to the problem of televising history and to acknowledging the relationship of the writing of history to the present, as well as dealing with the difficulties and complexities of that present. It might be constructed as one step towards removing the 'block to this much sadder recognition of what the real shape of the problem is':

> Maybe then you need different figures who are not only the people suffering at the end of this process, but the people - however small a minority - who are reactive and fighting about it. Maybe you need that, if you were to tell the whole story. (Aspinall & Williams:152)

For this reason, The Dragon does not offer a point of resolution of the text but remains suspended, awaiting a resolution elsewhere of 'the problem', an unusual strategy elaborated in the extensive materials provided in the study packs. These packs are filled with archival materials, and organised around the themes of the series, namely, the ages of the princes, the gentry and the people, as well as a pack on Welsh women's history.

This organisation is characterised as a chronological breakdown, but it is clearly a particular historical conception of 'the past' into

certain kinds of ages, namely, of the topside (princes and gentry) and underside (people and women) of history as the deployment of political power. The pack itself consists of a brief introduction, a chronology of Welsh events (from 250,000 BC-1412 in Pack I, 1415-1831 in Pack II, and 1839-1984 in Pack III), a bibliography, and a set of archival materials and sources.

As can be seen from this chronology, 'history' has a curious way of compacting itself as it retreats from the ever-present, thus Pack I bears the weight of 251,412 years, Pack II of 416 years, Pack III of 143 years, while Pack IV takes on the full 251,984 years of recorded Welsh history. This division alone might seem rather strange reflecting rather more than 'significant events' the array of the kinds of evidence that we currently term 'historical' (or archival). Precisely what is intended by the series or the packs is not entirely clear; as the introduction indicates:

> Neither the programmes (in some episodes 500 years of history are covered in less than half an hour) nor the packs can hope to provide a complete picture of Welsh history. 'The Dragon Has Two Tongues' is intended to be the beginning of a process whereby a nation discovers its own past. (The Dragon, study pack - Introduction)

Precisely what this national quest might entail remains obscure, however the series is intended as 'a starting point' and the study packs as a stimulus 'to turn passive viewers into active participants in the search for our past':

> the viewer will then be able to look at the source material on which the programme is based and make up his or her own mind. There are viewing groups throughout Wales (and ... the UK) where viewers can follow up their own reading with discussion. (Ibid.)

The content of the proffered history, however, turns on a history of oppression, of foreign invasion, as is cued by the opening paragraphs of the study pack which present a history of political and military conquest, as recorded by historians and in legend:

> Welsh history begins with Maximus - at least in the view of the first writers of Welsh history ... Maximus became a central figure in Welsh historical traditions. (The Dragon, I:1)

While recorded history marks the military and political exploits, the associated legends roll 'disparate events into an entity', rendering Maximus somewhat larger than life. The historical traces continue through political shifts and cultural ramifications gradually building up a view of the undermining of Welsh-ness; as illustrated in these examples:

> Welsh culture and the Welsh language looked increasingly threatened (in the C19) ... through the sheer dominance of the neighbouring English language, the language of the world of economic prosperity. (Ibid., II:18)

> The first purely political publication in the Welsh language was a pamphlet on the American Revolution ... From the war sprang the first serious political reform movements ... This was powerfully reinforced by the dramatic impact of the French Revolution. During the 1790's the number of political publications in the Welsh language multiplied six-fold and the political challenge coincided with social crises induced by new industrial and agricultural enterprises ...
> The 1790's saw sporadic disturbances in Wales. (Ibid., II:30)

> By the 1870s Wales had become an industrial society and its population movements mirrored not the harvest and seasonal cycle but the rhythms of industrial prosperity or depression. (Ibid., II:36)

> The course of Welsh politics in the nineteenth century in many ways mirrored the wider 'political revolution' in Britain, both in the rise of Liberalism and the emergence of distinctly working-class political movements ... (but also) the arrival of specifically 'Welsh' issues in the politics of the nation. (Ibid., III:8)

Hanes y Cymry A history of the Welsh

The Dragon Has Two Tongues

OES Y WERIN
THE AGE OF THE PEOPLE

HTV 4

Cynhyrchwyd gan Wasanaeth Archifau Gwynedd, Cyngor Sir Gwynedd, mewn cydweithrediad â HTV a Sianel 4
Produced by Gwynedd Archives Service, Gwynedd County Council, in association with HTV and Channel 4

Wynford Vaughan Thomas Gwyn A Williams

"... everything that has happened in the past is still influencing us about what we feel about the present, and indeed what we feel about the future."

"But the past is something we construct from the present. You called me a magpie. Every historian is a magpie including yourself, and the facts you choose invariably seem to me to turn Welsh history into something cosy, smug, and invariably support whatever status quo exists."

"I called you a Marxist magpie. The Marxist picks out certain facts in history to create a pattern for the pre-destined future."

"That is rubbish, What the Marxist does is see history as a process advancing through contradiction and you route yourself in whole peoples, not in tiny elites."

OES Y WERIN
THE AGE OF THE PEOPLE

1 Dyddiad Diwydiant i Gymru

2 Effeithiau Cymdeithasol Diwydiant i Gymru

3 Effeithiau Cymdeithasol Diwydiant II Amodau Gweithio a Byw

4 Siartwyr

5 Rebecca

6 Cymru Anghydffurfiol

7 Cymreictod Ymfudwyr

8 Gwleidyddiaeth Cymru yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg: Dadeuoni

9 Gwleidyddiaeth Cymru yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg: Dadeuoni II

10 Gwleidyddiaeth Cymru yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg: Ymateb(ion) I

11 Gwleidyddiaeth Cymru yn y Bedwaredd Ganrif ar Bymtheg: Ymateb(ion) II

12 Cymru yng Ngwleidyddiaeth Prydain

13 Yr Hogyn a Fagwyd mewn Bathau

14 Undebau Llafur: Dechreuad

15 Undebau Llafur: Gloywi

16 Sosialaeth a chynnydd Llafur I

17 Sosialaeth a chynnydd Llafur II

18 Addysg Gosteiddio Gwerthoedd

19 Aflonyddwch Cyn y Rhyfel

20 Cymru ar Rhyfel Byd Cyntaf

21 Cymru ar Ôl y Rhyfel

22 1926

23 Diweithdra I: y Broblem

24 Diweithdra II: Ymateb(ion)

25 Undebaeth Gymreig

26 Cymru a Rhyfel Cartref Sbaen

27 Cymru ar Ail Ryfel Byd: Ymateb(ion)

28 Cymru ar Ail Ryfel Byd: Profiadau

29 Iaith a Diwylliant I

30 Iaith a Diwylliant II

31 Datblygiadau Gwleidyddol Twf Cenedlaetholdeb

32 Datblygiadau Gwleidyddol Cenedlaetholdeb a Datganoli

33 Datblygiadau Gwleidyddol III

34 Economi Cymru I

35 Economi Cymru II

5

> The rise of Socialism in Wales was intimately connected with the development of a remarkable tradition of independent working-class education in the valleys of South Wales (through Workmen's Institutes and the Workers Educational Association). (Ibid., III:18)
>
> 1926 continues to live in the collective folk memory of South Wales ... (when) the dream of workers' power fleetingly became a reality. (Ibid., III:22)
>
> Fierce resistance to oppressive forces had become almost a reflex action in mining communities in South Wales. (Ibid., III:24)

Thus, the first three packs concern a particular chronological unfolding of successive imperialist determinations which are posed as if all the same where only the name of the oppressor changes. This produces a uniform counterpart in the oppressed, an undifferentiated people gradually developing strategies of resistance. The skewing of that history is partially redressed by the Women's History pack which:

> is intended to provide a stimulus for further research into this grossly neglected area of Welsh history and a critique of the whole approach on which the series is based. (Ibid.: Introduction)

This is the history of those who do not figure prominently in the kind of history concerned with 'political, economic and military scrambles for power':

> The women's pack came into being as a response to the series' failure to grasp the opportunity to restore to visibility more than half the population of Wales. (Ibid., IV:Introduction)

Necessarily, this is a history of other kinds of tales, of those people and events who figures outside the decision-making procedures, and therefore outside the usual archival sources. While a valuable pack of other kinds of historical traces, this history requires more

than merely a placement alongside the conventional history where it merely works as tinsel on the tree, rather than as the uprooting of that tree. The hope of the compilers of Pack IV merely constitutes the pack as another bit of the jigsaw of history:

> History, after all, is not just to be found in official records held in record offices; it is also in the letters your grandmother kept, the bills your mother saved and the photograph you took last summer. Only when people snatch 'history' back from the historians and tell their own stories in their own words will true history begin to emerge. (Ibid., IV:Introduction)

Nonetheless, the history proffered is largely a history of the domestic realm (of homes, families, customs, manners, and social reforms), which remains in this project still distinct from that other history: the two are not brought into alignment.

Whereas About Time and The Country and The City are concerned respectively with a complacent view of the past and a negotiated relation with the past, The Dragon (perhaps even cued by the title) addresses a local and actual politics of contestation, of dealing with a contiguous state of inhabitants actively rejecting the mixed blessings of a colonial status, with economics (farming, mining, fishing) significantly undermined. As 'owners' of that space, the Welsh have seen its re-definition as objects for the tourist gaze and as commodities for the retired and second-home migrant. The designation of Wales as a folk culture has been reassigned as 'the problem of Wales'. While 'the problem' is generally acknowledged and sympathy extended, 'the problem' is only reinforced by that act of sympathising, nor will it go away or out of sight, so close is the site to the forces

that contribute to 'the problem'. It is for the contiguous nature of 'the problem' that narrative resolution cannot be established (cf. MacCabe, 1981:312).

This returns us to reiterating that television history is not about the past and of telling about the past, but a means of telling about us and of how we come to terms with our place. As Williams has argued:

> Each convention (of writing) must be assessed by what it is rooted in and what it does: an assessment that is related to a much more general historical judgment that is also an affiliation - not history as all that has happened, but as where oneself is in it. (Williams, 1979:307)

There can never be the whole story, just stories which reflect points of view, political priorities, and narrative strategies. The institution of television has transformed the telling of histories, taking it from official custodians and making us all potential tellers and audiences: it is in this context that passive viewers have been recast as active participants.

Techniques of telling, assumptions about telling and practices of listening have all shifted with the growth of the industry of television histories: it is those shifts which are the appropriate object of pedagogic attention. The problem for the tellers of history is to situate different 'peoples' in their interrelations and to articulate the politics of each telling. The narrative structure of The Dragon is a clue to the limits of political television. For although a programme can call for resolution, interpretation, making sense by the viewer, the available range of viewing positions

overdetermines the nature of those readings. Moreover, reading positions are in turn located within the discursive frameworks of everyday conversation, certain institutional conventions and available political strategies. Consequently, actual readings and resolutions are guaranteed to be highly circumscribed.

As teaching objects, such framing practices are themselves overdetermined by what constitutes a proper pedagogic object, conventions of interpretation and the politics of teaching. The emphasis on peoples and populisms currently dominating pedagogic practices guarantee no particular political sympathies or outcome, but rather more instantiate the institution of television with its competing voices, competing points of view, and competing audiences. People's accounts and people's histories may not open up new political awarenesses and possibilities but merely reproduce an updated evolutionary perspective. People under this regime become winners and losers: winners become individuals (great persons with vision) and losers become representatives of class (etc.) oppression (determined by greater forces). Consequently, it is difficult to see how the progressive tendency can do much more than flirt with convention, unless the terms on which those conventions are writ are remapped.

The three examples of employing particular relations of people to place that have been addressed here have sought the essence of identity through mechanisms of time, space and polarity, respectively. Each can be located within the transforming practice of writing and reading histories. Constructed within the spectacle, and ordered by the present, they can at best make explicit those connections and

acknowledge those constraints. Otherwise, as Paddy Roe remarked about his travelling companions:

> You people try and dig little bit more deep -
> you bin digging only white soil -
> try and find the black soil inside. (Benterrak:172)

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